

O.X.F.D. 2010 A.D. – NOTES FOR SONGS BY GEOFF SIMPSON

With a few weeks and a thousand British Pounds left at the end of two years living, studying and working in Oxford, UK (September 2008 - July 2010), I decided to record the 9 songs I had written and played at open mics during that time. I also recorded **Teach Transgressors**, an arrangement of Psalm 51, written a few years earlier, but a favorite at one particular open mic and at St. Edward's School chapel where I'd served as assistant chaplain for a year. (1st in the chronology of composition)

TEACH TRANSGRESSORS (from Psalm 51) (April 6, 2001)

Always before me, buried within me; Burning inside since my mother conceived me
Etched on my memory, blurring my vision; Leading in darkness pretending to see

Crushing, destroying, restricting, infection; Polluting, corrupting, deceiving, rejecting
Blinding and binding, deriding and hiding; Lord, hear my prayer in your mercy to me

*And I will teach transgressors your ways, And they will turn back to you
Save me from guilt, O God, And my tongue will sing of Your righteousness
O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise*

Broken in spirit, heart with contrition; Sacrifice only evoking remission
Wisdom and truth in the innermost place;
Let the bones you have crushed always show forth your praise

Mercy, compassion, and love never ending; Wash me and heal me, spirit transforming
Purify cleans & sustain & restore me; Let me hear gladness & show me your face

Barren Soul is about a woman who performed at the second open mic I attended in Oxford - at The Cape of Good Hope. She and her band had had a #4 UK hit in the 90s with a cover of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love". She was not happy to have fallen into obscurity - unrecognized and unappreciated by the university audience that night. The chorus, "barren soul", is my own (probably unfair) projection based upon what I later came to know of her story. (3rd)

BARREN SOUL (February 15, 2008)

"I couldn't even bothered be," the lady said indignantly
and walked away, guitar in hand, expecting them to notice.
But idle chatter all around meant no one even heard the sound
Her tiny heels were hammering on empty boards of notice.

My voice upon the radio is all I ever had to show

That I was someone; you should stop to listen, take a notice

Barren soul (x3) Barren so lonely I can't even cry/ Over my cold barren soul

"What does it count when all is done, there isn't any fame or fun
in taking a nostalgic journey no one else will notice.

Now every good one in the past is looking like it was the last
time I would be attracting the attention of your notice."

So, let it be the final chore, remembering how the lady swore,

To end it all without regard for what the final note is!!! !!!

Barren soul (x3) Barren so lonely I can't even cry/ Over my cold barren soul

To Never Let You Go is a love song & an apology to my guitar for allowing a stranger to play, and inflict significant neck damage (with a thumb-ring or nail) to "her" at an open mic at Jericho Tavern. (9th)

TO NEVER LET YOU GO (March 23, 2010)

Her smile as she looked at me, left me wondering if this could be
Mistaken case of identity, or something in these words.

Or Maybe in this borrowed tune, a memory like sweet perfume
with tender arms across her back, was dancing in her mind.

*Oh, how my rusted heart; Trusted someone in the dark
Her smile broke my guarantee, To never let you go*

In the flurry of the night, Despite the hour and the light
I never should have let you rest, On someone else's knee
& as her fingers made you ring, The other one was burrowing.

The nail she drove into your neck, I didn't even see
*Oh, how my rusted heart, Trusted someone in the dark
Her smile broke my guarantee, To never let you go*

I don't know why I did not refuse, To let her pick and sing those Folsom Blues
Imprisoned every time I feel the scars, For what she did to you

What Is That To Me is the centerpiece of the CD; a reflection on divine love based on Ephesians 3:18, and on the hymn "O love, how deep, how broad, how high, how passing thought and fantasy..." (6th)

WHAT IS THAT TO ME? (September 2009)

It's bigger than me
Deeper than both of us
Longer than time
Higher than living
Wider than fantasy
shining like the sun. *What is that to me?*

It cuts through the haze
covering centuries
shattering lies
walking the highways
cluttered by casualties
With healing in it's wings. *What is that to me?*

Star of the morning
Calming the sea,
Governor setting
Prisoners free. *What is that to me? What is that to me?*

Gatwick The one thing that is not completely true about this story is that I only *thought*, but *didn't* actually say out loud, "she said: 'go away'". The key to understanding *why* this happened to me is in the last line of the second chorus: "...with no visa". I had not realized until too late that as a citizen of a non-EU/ non-commonwealth country I needed to get a student visa in order to be allowed to enter the UK for the purpose of studying. I finished the final step in the visa process on the very morning of my flight from Philadelphia to London. Lacking only the actual printed visa, I figured I could acquire that over there. Full disclosure to the emigration officer at the airport proved

tactically unhelpful in the short-run. I noticed at the time that most of the nearly 20 detainees in the room with me were from former British colonies. (10th)

GATWICK (a saga of September 2008) (June 2, 2010)

On the day I first came over to your town
I told my story to the crown
I knew that there were holes in what I said
So did he, so he led me to the
waiting room where bolted to the floor
Where the benches and the tables, and a door
To the bathroom, called the toilet or the loo,
And a window for security to look in to see

*Africans and Indians and me
two eastern Europeans and Caribbeans, all
sleeping on the benches in the light
of the errors in our judgment sometime prior to
the flight we each had taken to this land
of the language that we all were speaking in*

The Russian said her brother was "a friend"
The businessman had local born children
A worried woman opened up the psalms
The polish man had brought a deck of cards along
While the television blasted breaking news
The home office was taking interviews
The taller man was bowing toward the east
When they brought a tray of tea and biscuits to relieve the

*Africans and Indians and me
two eastern Europeans and Caribbeans, all
sleeping on the benches in the light
of the errors in our judgment sometime
prior to the the flight we each had taken to this land
with NO VISA or without a proper plan*

The morning brought an escort to the gate
To be the first to get in to my seat
I'm glad that as I walked my hands were free
Not in cuffs, like the Sudanese, and
When the friendly flight attendant said,
With my guitar now safely overhead,
"Say, weren't you flying with us yesterday?"
I replied: "she said 'go away'" NOT that

*Africans and Indians and me
had spent the night in airport custody*

**Thank you for your alphabet and law
Your history, democracy, and old king John
We don't know where we'd be without you now
Not in the international exchange with all the**

*Africans and Indians and me
two eastern Europeans and Caribbeans
all telling tales and sleeping in the light
waiting to get on the next departing flight*

Thank you after fighting Andrew J. [that's Andrew JACKSON]
For giving up and sailing on your way

in 1814 down in New Orleans
Now we know what "Independence" truly means, and
Thank you for your fashion setting ways
Your music and for all of Shakespeare's plays
but mostly thanks for leaving us alone,
And for not quite wanting us to come "back home"

*all these Africans and Indians and me
two eastern Europeans and Caribbeans all
sleeping on the benches in the light
of the errors in our judgment sometime
prior to (or just after) the
the flight we each had taken to this land
of the language that we all were speaking in*

As If It Didn't Matter combines the possible thoughts of Simon Peter, who after apparently abandoning his fishing career for three years seemed to have taken it back up again, with my own reflections after leaving a school position held for fifteen years still wondering what I would do next. (7th)

AS IF IT DIDN'T MATTER (October 2009)

The fisherman on solid ground, the net he left behind is found
In disarray and disrepair, rent asunder, torn and bare, effective now for nothing

Content no longer with his trade, the paper sail that he had made
Is rendered useless by the storm, of consequences he had borne, for wasting time and wanting

*Adrift and aimless consciously, intent on hapless apathy,
Despite the danger of the deep, of swallowing his soul complete
The quiet flame upon the shore, a bitter comfort to ignore
The ancient precious memory, as if it didn't matter*

The common one of land and coast, is holding out a broken host
For prodigal and refugee, whose only hope is clemency, for failure to deliver

*Adrift and aimless consciously, intent on hapless apathy
Despite the danger of the deep, of swallowing his soul complete
The quiet flame upon the shore, a bitter comfort to ignore
The ancient precious memory, as if it didn't matter (4x)*

The Poverty of Illness or the Luxury of Health Verses 1 and 3 tell the story of my visit with a teenage friend who was undergoing chemotherapy at St. Mary's hospital in Richmond, Virginia. On my way out, I crossed paths with a man for whom a new building at my old school had been named. Verse 2 refers to a debilitating ear infection affecting my ability to fully appreciate the high "C" featured in Allegri's Miserere at the New College Chapel Ash Wednesday evensong service. The "poor man" refers alternately to one who is impoverished (of money or of health), and to the one who humbled himself unto death in order to save those unable to save themselves. (8th)

THE POVERTY OF ILLNESS OR THE LUXURY OF HEALTH (October 2009)

The poor man saw the rich man just outside the corridor
The poor man offered greetings, the rich man had no more
Standing in the shadow of Saint Mary in her crown,
The chamber for the children & the cell that keeps them down

The benefactor wishing he could buy another round
But in his strength his poverty is found

The presence of your beauty is the music in my ear
Deafening the stillness that in absence would appear
The ashes to remember and the voice to higher C
Rising like the incense with the wings of harmony
The heart and soul and spirit of this coil all agree [Allegri]
The rich man is a poor man without thee

My younger friend gets wiser every day
Knowing how the enemy can take his breath away
Understanding something written in between the lines
The magic of the mountains and the wind beneath the pines
The visit and the telephone serve only to remind
The rich man will not leave the poor behind

**The poverty of illness or the luxury of health
Darkening this vision of myself
Am I losing or beginning, is this winning or the end?
That all depends upon the nature of the wealth**

What started in a garden can in every seed be found
Every generation, every branch upon the ground
Reaching and beseeching for the suffering to end
Longing for the inconvenient injury to mend
While all above, below and in between a song will send
The poor man over dignity, transcend.

New Song verses were written after someone said, essentially, that my songs contained too many words. The chorus was my reaction/response to the recently released U2 song, Magnificent. (5th)

NEW SONG (May 10, 2009)

Every song I write I add a verse or two too many: a mouthful by the time I move my teeth.
With rhyming NOT my strongest suit, nor metaphor a kind recruit,
It might be good to focus on the chorus:

Everybody's singing a new song for you, and all I want to do is sing one too
So, Listening to this advise, I'll only write the verses twice, with fewer words each time.

"Less is more", I hear them say: "get to the point and move away.

The final word ALONE is better for us:"

Everybody's singing a new song for you, and all I want to do is sing one too.

A new song for you, And I just want to sing one for you, too.

Lie To Me The only requirement of the contest was that this be the title of the song submitted. I wrote the lyrics right away in September 2008, just before leaving for the UK, but added the music a year later. (The contest was well past by then.) Verse 1 is about the fair weather advocate; verse 2 is full of false hope clichés. (2nd / 8th).

LIE TO ME (words October 2008; music October 2009)

Said you'd always be there for me
Said you had my best in mind
Spoke of loyalty and honor
Ever faithful, ever kind
Turned a gentle disposition

To indifference unkind
With a hand upon the shoulder
And an eye upon the time

*You are a LIE TO ME; to me you are a lie
You lie before me; after me you lie*

Good behavior is rewarded
You can make it if you try
Always put the best foot forward
Everything will turn out fine
You can have it you want it
If you want it hard enough
Every seeker finds the answer
Seeking is your happiness

Miserere, translated "have mercy", is the first word of Psalm 51 (Latin Vulgate, Psalm 50:3). This song is written from the perspective of one who seeks refuge on the streets of Oxford, lives in the shadow of Martyrs Memorial (to reformers Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, burned in 1556), and who hears Great Tom from Tom Tower, ringing nightly at 9:05 – once for each of the original (16th century) 101 students of the college (Christ Church, founded 1529, re-founded 1546, by Henry VIII). (4th)

Miserere February 2009
Have I reached the bottom? No, still not yet
I've thought about trying: no plan of attack
I could have been running; no goal in mind
Instead I'm just sitting here biding my time
Miserere; Miserere

The weather and patience are both wearing thin
Food on the table is lacking again
. another new song with nothing to say
just like the last one, no light of day
Miserere; Miserere

city and spire
fame growing higher
of martyrs burning
will they inspire?

still, I may be wondering if this lonely year
on top of the mountain where nothing is clear
is only for listening to what's in my head
then it's energy wasted not lying in bed
Miserere; Miserere

The flaking limes
The ancient chimes
For whom doth it toll
a hundred one times
Miserere; Miserere